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THE MAN BORN TO
BE KING

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

(FROM "THE EARTHLY PARADISE")

BY

WILLIAM MORRIS

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
FOR THE USE OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

NEW IMPRESSION

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INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM MORRIS, one of the most eminent imaginative writers of the Victorian age, differs from most other poets and men of letters in two ways—first, he did great work in many other things as well as in literature; secondly, he had beliefs of his own about the meaning and conduct of life, about all that men think and do and make, very different from those of ordinary people, and he carried out these views in his writings as well as in all the other work he did throughout his life.

He was born in 1834. His father, a member of a business firm in the City of London, was a wealthy man and lived in Essex, in a country house with large gardens and fields belonging to it, on the edge of Epping Forest. Until the age of thirteen Morris was at home among a large family of brothers and sisters. He delighted in the country life and especially in the Forest, which is one of the most romantic parts of England, and which he made the scene of many real and imaginary adventures. From fourteen to eighteen he was at school at Marlborough among the Wiltshire downs, in a

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country full of beauty and history, and close to another of the ancient forests of England, that of Savernake. He proceeded from school to Exeter College, Oxford, where he soon formed a close friendship with a remarkable set of young men of his own age; chief among these, and Morris's closest friend for the rest of his life, was Edward Burne-Jones, the painter. Study of the works of John Ruskin confirmed them in the admiration which they already felt for the life and art of the Middle Ages. In the summer vacation of 1855 the two friends went to Northern France to see the beautiful towns and splendid churches with which that country had been filled between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries; and there they made up their minds that they cared for art more than for anything else, such as wealth or ease or the opinion of the world, and that as soon as they left Oxford they would become artists. By art they meant the making of beauty for the adornment and enrichment of human life, and as artists they meant to strive against all that was ugly or mean or untruthful in the life of their own time.

Art, as they understood it, is one single thing covering the whole of life but practised in many special forms that differ one from another. Among these many forms of art there are two of principal importance. One of the two is the art which is concerned with the making and adorning of the houses in which men and women live; that is to say, architecture, with all its attendant arts of

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decoration, including sculpture, painting, the designing and ornamenting of metal, wood and glass, carpets, paper-hangings, woven, dyed and embroidered cloths of all kinds, and all the furniture which a house may have for use or pleasure. The other is the art which is concerned with the making and adorning of stories in prose and verse. Both of these kinds of art were practised by Morris throughout his life. The former was his principal occupation; he made his living by it, and built up in it a business which alone made him famous, and which has had a great influence towards bringing more beauty into daily domestic life in England and in other countries also. His profession was thus that of a manufacturer, designer, and decorator. When he had to describe himself by a single word, he called himself a designer. But it is the latter branch of his art which principally concerns us now, the art of a maker and adorer of stories. He became famous in this kind of art also, both in prose and verse, as a romance-writer and a poet. But he spoke of it as play rather than work, and although he spent much time and great pains on it, he regarded it as relaxation from the harder and more constant work of his life, which was carrying on the business of designing, painting, weaving, dyeing, printing and other occupations of that kind. In later life he also gave much of his time to political and social work, with the object of bringing back mankind into a path from which they had strayed since the end of the Middle Ages, and creating a

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state of society in which art, by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user, might be naturally, easily, and universally produced.

Even as a boy Morris had been noted for his love of reading and inventing tales; but he did not begin to write any until he had been for a couple of years at Oxford. His earliest poems and his earliest written prose tales belong to the same year, 1855, in which he determined to make art his profession. The first of either that he published appeared in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, which was started and managed by him and his friends in 1856. In 1858, after he had left Oxford, he brought out a volume of poems called, after the title of the first poem in the book, "The Defence of Guenevere." Soon afterwards he founded, with some of his old Oxford friends and others whom he had made in London, among whom Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the leading spirit, the firm of Morris and Company, manufacturers and decorators. His business, in which he was the principal and finally the sole partner, took up the main part of his time. He had also married, and built himself a beautiful small house in Kent, the decoration of which went busily on for several years. Among all these other occupations he almost gave up writing stories, but never ceased reading and thinking about them. In 1865 he came back to live in London, where, being close to his work, he had more leisure for other things; and between 1865 and 1870 he wrote between thirty and forty tales

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in verse, containing not less than seventy or eighty thousand lines in all. The longest of these tales, "The Life and Death of Jason," appeared in 1867. It is the old Greek story of the ship *Argo* and the voyage in quest of the Golden Fleece. Twenty-five other tales are included in "The Earthly Paradise," published in three parts between 1868 and 1870.

During these years Morris learned Icelandic, and his next published works were translations of some of the Icelandic sagas, writings composed from six to nine hundred years ago, and containing a mass of legends, histories and romances finely told in a noble language. These translations were followed in 1876 by his great epic poem, "Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs." In that poem he retold a story of which an Icelandic version, the "Volsunga Saga," written in the twelfth century, is one of the world's masterpieces. It is the great epic of Northern Europe, just as the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" of Homer are the chief epics of ancient Greece, and the "Æneid" of Virgil the chief epic of the Roman Empire. Morris's love for these great stories of ancient times led him to rewrite the tale of the Volsungs and Niblungs, which he reckoned the finest of them all, more fully and on a larger scale than it had ever been written before. He had already, in 1875, translated the "Æneid" into verse, and some ten years later, in 1886-87, he also made a verse translation of the "Odyssey." In 1873 he had also written another very beautiful poem, "Love is Enough,"

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containing the story of three pairs of lovers, a countryman and country-woman, an emperor and empress, and a prince and peasant girl. This poem was written in the form of a play, not of a narrative.

To write prose was at first for Morris more difficult than to write poetry. Verse came naturally to him, and he composed in prose only with much effort until after long practice. Except for his early tales in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* and his translations of Icelandic sagas, he wrote little but poetry until the year 1882. About that time he began to give lectures and addresses, and wrote them in great numbers during the latter part of his life. A number of them were collected and published in two volumes called "*Hopes and Fears for Art*" and "*Signs of Change*," and many others have been published separately. He thus gradually accustomed himself to prose composition. For several years he was too busy with other things, which he thought more important, to spend time on story-telling; but his instinct forced itself out again, and in 1886 he began the series of romances in prose or in mixed prose and verse which went on during the next ten years. The chief of these are, "*A Dream of John Ball*," "*The House of the Wolfings*," "*The Roots of the Mountains*," "*News from Nowhere*," "*The Glittering Plain*," "*The Wood beyond the World*," "*The Well at the World's End*," "*The Water of the Wondrous Isles*," and "*The Sundering Flood*." During the same years he also translated, out of Icelandic and

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old French books, more of the stories which he had long known and admired. "The Sundering Flood" was written in his last illness, and finished by him within a few days of his death, in the autumn of 1896.

"The Earthly Paradise" is the largest and most important of all Morris's poetical works. It is also the most striking instance of what he meant by the art of poetry; that is to say, the skilfully designed construction, and the furnishing with beautiful and appropriate ornament, of a house of tales, in which the reader may find shelter, enjoyment and rest. For this purpose he selected, from among the vast number of stories he knew, those which he liked best. These he retold, redesigning them so far as he thought fit, and putting into them details and descriptions suggested by his wide knowledge, his vivid imagination, and his intense love of beauty. The idea of a series of narrative poems arranged within a single framework came to him in the first instance from "The Canterbury Tales" of Geoffrey Chaucer (1328-1400), the English poet among his predecessors whom he most loved and admired. In Chaucer the stories are supposed to be told by a company of pilgrims who are riding together from London to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas of Canterbury. Morris invented a larger and more romantic framework for his collection of tales. The story inside which the rest of the stories are set is this. Certain persons set sail, in the autumn of the year 1372,

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from a country then being ravaged by the terrible pestilence known as the Black Death, to try to discover among the unexplored Western seas an Earthly Paradise where there was no sickness or old age or death, of which rumours were current in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Among the crew are men from more than one country. The leader of the expedition is a Norseman, who had been born at Constantinople, where his father was serving in the famous corps of the Varangians, a bodyguard chiefly composed of Norse and English, attached to the person of the Greek Emperors. One of his companions is a scholar from Swabia in Central Germany, who knew all the German chronicles, and had read many books of ancient history and of magic. Another is a Breton, who had been driven from his home in the French wars. They sail out into the Atlantic through the English Channel, where they fall in with the fleet of Edward III. on its way to France with the king himself, the Black Prince, and a great English army. At last they reach America, as Columbus actually did a century later. After many wanderings and adventures, in which, however, they never succeed in finding that Earthly Paradise of which they are in search, the remnant of them, now old men, arrive at an island in a distant sea, where the people speak the Greek language and are the descendants of an ancient Greek colony which had existed there for many hundreds of years. Here they are kindly received, and settle down to spend the rest of

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their days in peace. It is arranged among them that they shall keep two feasts every month, and at each of these feasts a story is to be told, by one of the Greeks and one of the Wanderers alternately. The twenty-four stories which follow are told in the twelve months which pass after their arrival. Twelve of them are accordingly stories of ancient Greece. The other twelve are stories which were then current in different countries of Western Europe. Some of them are to be found in French and German romances, others in Norse or Icelandic sagas, and some in the Arabian tales, many of which had become known in Europe long before they were collected and written down in the "Book of the Thousand and One Nights."

The story of "The Man Born to be King" is the first of the twelve tales told by the Wanderers. "It was foretold to a great king, that he who should reign after him should be low-born and poor; which thing came to pass in the end, for all that the king could do." It is founded on one of the stories in a very celebrated collection of tales, called *Gesta Romanorum*, which had a wide circulation in the Middle Ages. It is not known either when or where that collection was first made. It is written in Latin, which was then a language used in common by all educated persons throughout Europe. It was well known and much read in England, France and Germany, and there are early translations of it in the languages of all three countries. The name *Gesta Romanorum*, "The

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Deeds of the Romans," was given to it because the greater number of the stories in it are told of real or imaginary Roman Emperors. In some of the versions of the *Gesta*, and also in the "Golden Legend," a collection of lives and legends of the saints written by a Genoese monk towards the end of the thirteenth century, the story is told as having happened to the Emperor Conrad II. (1024-1039). But that is only an invention, for Conrad had a son of his own, who succeeded him as Emperor. The following is a rendering of the story as it is told in one of the Latin versions of the *Gesta*.

Of a Forester's Son, whom a King strove to kill

Once upon a time there was a mighty king, who had one only daughter. It happened that while hunting he was separated from the rest of his company by a thick mist, and lost his way. While he was still trying to retrace his course, night came on him in the middle of a forest. Seeing a cottage, he rode to it, knocked at the door, and asked for shelter for the night. The forester made him welcome to supper and bed, although his wife was very near her delivery. When the king had fallen asleep, he dreamed that a voice said to him, "Take! take! take!" He awoke with a start, but soon fell asleep again; when he heard another voice calling, "Give up! give up! give up!" Meanwhile, the forester's wife had been delivered of a fine boy. The king, who had been

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again startled out of sleep by the second voice, presently fell asleep again, and a third time a voice came to him, crying, "Flee! flee! flee! to-night is born he who shall be king when you are dead." A third time the king awoke, and while pondering over the voices, heard the wailing of the new-born child. "Is this he who shall reign after me?" said he to himself; "so sure as I live, I will make it otherwise." In the morning he told the forester who he was, and asked to see the child, upon whose brow he noted a birth-mark. Then he told the forester that, in reward for his hospitality, he would send for the child soon after, and have it brought up at court among his own household. The forester, suspecting no ill, thanked him for his great favour, and the king mounted his horse and rode back to his palace. A few days afterwards he called for some of his knights, and charged them on their allegiance, and on pain of death if they did not carry out his orders, to go to the forester's house, bring away the child, kill it on their way home, and bring him the heart as a token. They accordingly went off and brought away the child from the unsuspecting forester; but when they came to the place which they had fixed upon for killing it, they were seized with terror and remorse at the thought of committing so great a sin, and, after taking counsel among themselves, hid the infant in a hollow tree, killed one of the wild swine that lived in the wood, and cut out its heart and carried it to the king. When they brought

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the heart to the king as he sat in hall, he threw it into the fire on the hearth, saying, "So much for dreams; there lies he who was to reign after me!"

On the next day, one Count Leopold was hunting in the same forest, when his hounds broke off from the stag they were chasing and began to sniff round a tree; the Count, on coming up and searching, found the infant still alive and carried it off to his castle and showed it to his wife. Being childless, they agreed to bring up the child as their own; and he grew up as the Count's son, a noble boy and well beloved of all.

So the time went until the boy was in his twentieth year, when the king held a great festival, to which all the lords of his kingdom were invited, among them Count Leopold and his son. At the banquet the Count sat at the king's table, at which the boy, as was the custom of young squires, stood and served. The king noticed the mark on his brow that he had seen long ago in the forester's house, and asked the Count: "Whose son is this?" At first the Count said he was his own son, but, on being charged to tell the truth on his allegiance, he related to the king how he had found him in the hollow tree, and did not know whose child he was. The king called for the knights who had been sent on that errand, and they, being threatened with death, confessed what they had done. The king said to himself: "I have been deceived; this is he who shall reign after me, but I will bring him to his death yet and make the prophecy false."

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Accordingly, he told the Count that he would keep the boy to serve in his court. The Count assented willingly; and for a while the boy remained in the palace, while the king considered how to kill him.

At that time the queen his wife and the princess his daughter were in a distant part of the kingdom; and the king, calling the boy, said to him: "My son, it is long since I have had news of the queen; go to her, and take a letter with you." "My lord," he answered, "I am ready to obey you in all things." Then the king had a letter written, bidding the queen, as soon as she read it, to put the bearer to a shameful death; for if she failed to do so within three days, she should be put to death herself without mercy. This letter he sealed with his own ring and gave it in the evening to the boy, telling him to start next morning at daybreak. He was early afoot next morning, and travelled for three days; in the afternoon of the third day, he arrived very tired at the house of a certain knight and asked for food and rest. The knight, seeing that he was well-looking and bore a king's message, made him welcome. After his meal the boy, being very weary, fell fast asleep. While he slept, the knight noticed a small box lying beside him, and through curiosity he opened it and read the king's letter. He was greatly grieved at what he read: "It would be a sore sin," he said, "to put so goodly and gracious a boy to death; it shall not be so." No sooner said than done; he skilfully erased all the writing, and wrote in place of it thus: "I

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command you on pain of death to marry the bearer of this letter to our only daughter, with all joy and festivity, within three days of his arrival, and to invite all your nobles to the wedding. Do this, or you shall be put to death without mercy."

Having done this, he folded up the letter again with the seal unbroken, and put it back into the box while the boy was still fast asleep. On waking, he asked leave to go, but his entertainer kept him for that night; next morning he bade the knight farewell and went on to the queen, to whom, after courteous salutation, he handed the king's letter. On reading it and understanding its contents, she kissed the boy, saying, "Be welcome, my dear son; gladly will I fulfil the command of my lord the king." She sent out at once summoning all the nobles of the land to meet her on the third day after. They all came with great pomp, and the youth and the king's daughter were solemnly wedded; a banquet followed, at which the nobles gave gifts to the bride, and then departed. For three months the bridegroom stayed there with the queen. Soon afterwards the king came to these parts with a great train. The queen, on hearing that he was at hand, told her son-in-law to mount his horse and go with her to meet him. When they met, the king kissed the queen; but on seeing the boy by her side, frowned and trembled, and cried out to the queen: "You are a dead woman!" "O my lord, mercy!" said she; "how have I deserved death?" "I wrote to you,"

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he answered, "bidding you on pain of death have this young man slain within three days, and he is yet alive. Why did you not obey my letter?" "O my lord," she said, "hear me! I have kept your letter, the plain content of which is, that within three days I am to give our only daughter to this young man to wife."

The king thought, and said, "Has this been done accordingly?" "Yes, my lord," she answered, "long ago." "Show me the letter I sent you," said he. Having seen and read the letter, the king said, "What great folly is it to ordain otherwise than as God has ordained!" Forthwith he kissed the boy and received him as his son; and after his decease, he reigned in his room.

Other versions of the story vary from this one in some particulars, but are the same in substance. Morris, as will be seen by reading the poem which follows, both altered it and added to it. To make the tale as perfect as he could, he had to make some changes in its structure: and when the design of this story was arranged to his satisfaction, he added rich detail and ornament throughout, as an architect might adorn a house that he had built with carving and painting, furniture and hangings and pictures. Among the more important structural additions or changes that he made we may notice the forewarning that is given to the king by a magician; the death of the woodman's wife, which makes him willing to give up the child; the second

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attempt to kill the boy when half grown, and his rescue by the monk, which enables him to be well educated in the Abbey and fit to marry a princess; and most important of all, the change in the whole of the latter part of the story by making the princess herself read the letter and rewrite it, in her new-born pity and love for the handsome boy whom she had only just seen. This last turn of the story he took from a thirteenth-century French romance, one of those which he translated and printed many years later. All these changes make the story more reasonable and human, easier to believe and pleasanter to follow. The rich and beautiful descriptive details of the poem are also Morris's own.

The story as Morris tells it does not belong to any definite time or exact place. But the Wanderer who tells it is supposed to do so about the end of the fourteenth century; and while he begins by speaking of it as having happened "in days of old," the dress, habits, and general surroundings of the people in the story are those of his own time or a little earlier. The landscape, with its fern-brakes, fir-woods and apple-orchards, and a warmer country of vineyards a few days' journey to the South, is that of Northern France or Central Germany.

The verse in which the poem is written, an eight-syllabled rhyming couplet, was one of the favourite metres of Morris's favourite master in poetry, Chaucer. It is one which no other English poet besides these two has used for narrative with the same ease, fluency and sweetness.

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

A KING there was in days of old
Who ruled wide lands, nor lacked for gold,
Nor honour, nor much longed-for praise,
And his days were called happy days,
So peaceable his kingdoms were,
While others wrapt in war and fear
Fell ever unto worse and worse.

Therefore his city was the nurse
Of all that men then had of lore,
And none were driven from his door 10
That seemed well skilled in anything;
So of the sages was he king;
And from this learned man and that,
Little by little, lore he gat,
And many a lordless, troubled land
Fell scarce loth to his dreaded hand.

Midst this it chanced that, on a day,
Clad in his glittering gold array,
He held a royal festival;
And nigh him in his glorious hall 20
Beheld his sages most and least,
Sitting much honoured at the feast.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But mid the faces so well known,
Of men he well might call his own,
He saw a little wizened man
With face grown rather grey than wan
From lapse of years ; beardless was he,
And bald as is the winter tree ;
But his two deep-set, glittering eyes
Gleamed at the sight of mysteries 30
None knew but he ; few words he said,
And unto those small heed was paid ;
But the King, young, yet old in guile,
Failed not to note a flickering smile
Upon his face, as now and then
He turned him from the learned men
Toward the King's seat, so thought to know
What new thing he might have to show ;
And presently, the meat being done,
He bade them bring him to his throne, 40
And when before the throne he stood,
He said, " We deem thy coming good ;
What is thine art ? canst thou in rhyme
Tell stories of the ancient time ?
Or dost thou chronicle old wars ?
Or know'st thou of the change of stars ?
Or seek'st thou the transmuting stone ?
Or canst thou make the shattered bone
Grow whole, and dying men arise
And live as long as thou the wise ? 50
Or what gift dost thou bring me here,
Where nought but men of lore are dear
To me and mine ? "

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“O King,” said he,
“But few things know I certainly,
Though I have toiled for many a day
Along the hard and doubtful way
That bringeth wise men to the grave :
And now, for all the years I gave
To know all things that man can learn,
A few months’ learned life I earn, 60
Nor feel much liker to a God
Than when beside my sheep I trod
Upon the thymy, wind-swept down.
Yet am I come unto thy town
To tell thee somewhat that I learned
As on the stars I gazed, and yearned
To cast this weary body off,
With all its chains of mock and scoff
And creeping death—for as I read
The sure decrees with joy and dread, 70
Somewhat I saw writ down of thee,
And who shall have the sovereignty
When thou art gone.”

“Nay,” said the King,
“Speak quick and tell me of the thing.”

“Sire,” said the Sage, “thine ancient line
Thou holdest as a thing divine,
So long and undisturbed it is,
But now shall there be end to this,
For surely in my glittering text
I read that he who shall sit next 80
On this thine ancient throne and high,
Shall be no better born than I

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Whose grandsire none remembereth,
Nor where my father first drew breath."

"Yea," said the King, "and this may be ;
Yet, O Sage, ere I credit thee,
Some token certes must thou show,
Or tell me what I think to know
Alone, among all folk alive ;
Then surely great gifts will I give .
To thee, and make thee head of all
Who watch the planets rise and fall."

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"Bid these stand backward from thy throne,"
The Sage said, "then to thee alone
Long hidden matters will I tell ;
And then, if thou believest, well—
And if thou dost not, well also ;
No gift I ask, but leave to go,
For strange to me is this thy state,
And for thyself, thou well may'st hate
My crabbed age and misery."

100

"Well," said the King, "let this thing be ;
And ye, my masters, stand aback !
For of the fresh air have I lack,
And in my pleasance would I walk
To hearken this grave elder's talk
And gain new lore."

Therewith he rose

And led the way unto a close,
Shaded with grey-leaved olive-trees ;
And when they were amidst of these
He turned about and said, "Speak, friend,
And of thy folly make an end,

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And take this golden chain therefore."

"Rightly thou namest my weak lore,"

The Sage said, "therefore to the end

Be wise, and what the fates may send

Take thou, nor struggle in the net

Wherein thine helpless feet are set !

—Hearken ! a year is well-nigh done

Since, at the hottest of the sun,

120

Stood Antony beneath this tree,

And took a jewelled cup of thee,

And drank swift death in guise of wine :

Since he, most trusted of all thine,

At last too full of knowledge grew,

And chiefly, he of all men knew

How the Earl Marshal Hugh had died,

Since he had drawn him on to ride

Into a bushment of his foes,

To die amidst the rain of blows."

130

"Thou knowest that by me he died,"

The King said : "how if now I cried,

Help ! the magician slayeth me ?

Swiftly should twenty sword-blades be

Clashing within thy ribs, and thou

Nearer to death than even now."

"Not thus, O King, I fear to die,"

The Sage said ; "Death shall pass me by

Many a year yet, because perchance

I fear not aught his clattering dance,

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And have enough of weary days.

But thou—farewell, and win the praise

Of sages, by thy hearkening

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

With heed to this most certain thing.
Fear not because this tale I know,
For to my grey tower back I go
High raised above the heathy hills
Where the great erne the swift hare kills,
Or stoops upon the new-yeaned lamb ;
There almost as a God I am
Unto few folk, who hear thy name
Indeed, but know nought of thy fame,
Nay, scarce if thou be man or beast."

150

So saying, back unto the feast
He turned, and went adown the hall,
Not heeding any gibe or call ;
And left the palace and the town
With face turned toward his windy down.
Back to the hall, too, the King went,
With eyes upon the pavement bent
In pensive thought, delighting not
In riches and his kingly lot ;
But thinking how his days began
And of the lonely souls of man.

160

But time passed, and midst this and that
The wise man's message he forgat ;
And as a king he lived his life,
And took to him a noble wife
Of the kings' daughters, rich and fair.
And they being wed for nigh a year,
And she now growing great with child,
It happed unto the forest wild

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This king with many folk must ride
At ending of the summer-tide ;
There boar and hart they brought to bay,
And had right noble prize that day ;
But when the noon was now long past,
And the thick woods grew overcast,
They roused the mightiest hart of all.
Then loudly 'gan the King to call 180
Unto his huntsmen, not to leave
That mighty beast for dusk nor eve
Till they had won him ; with which word
His horn he blew, and forth he spurred,
Taking no thought of most or least,
But only of that royal beast.
And over rough and smooth he rode,
Nor yet for anything abode,
Till dark night swallowing up the day
With blindness his swift course must stay. 190
Nor was there with him any one,
So far his fair steed had outrun
The best of all his hunting-folk.

So, glancing at the stars that broke
'Twixt the thick branches here and there,
Backward he turned, and peered with care
Into the darkness, but saw nought,
Nor heard his folk, and therewith thought
His bed must be the brake leaves brown.
Then in a while he lighted down, 200
And felt about a little space,
If he might find a softer place ;
But as he groped from tree to tree

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Some glimmering light he seemed to see
'Twixt the dark stems, and thither turned,
If yet perchance some wood-fire burned
Within a peasant's hut, where he
Might find, amidst their misery,
Rough food, or shelter at the least.

So, leading on his wearied beast,
Blindly he crept from tree to tree,
Till slowly grew that light to be
The thing he looked for, and he found
A hut on a cleared space of ground,
From whose half-opened door there streamed
The light that erst far off had gleamed.

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Then of that shelter was he fain,
But just as he made shift to gain
The open space in front of it,
A shadow o'er the grass did flit,
And on the wretched threshold stood
A big man, with a bar of wood
In his right hand, who seemed as though
He got him ready for a blow ;
But ere he spoke the King cried, " Friend,
May God good hap upon thee send,
If thou wilt give me rest this night,
And food according to thy might."

220

" Nay," said the carle, " my wife lieth
In labour, and is nigh her death :
Nor canst thou enter here at all,
But near by is my asses' stall,
Who on this night bide in the town ;
There, if thou wilt, may'st thou lie down,

230

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

And sleep until the dawn of day,
And I will bring thee what I may
Of food and drink."

Then said the King,
"Thanked be thou; neither for nothing
Shalt thou this good deed do to me."

"Nay," said the carle, "let these things be. 240
Surely I think before the morn,
To be too weary and forlorn
For gold much heart in me to put."
With that he turned, and from the hut
Brought out a lantern, and rye-bread,
And wine, and showed the King a shed,
Strewed with a litter of dry brake:
Withal he muttered, for his sake,
Unto Our Lady some rude prayer,
And turned about and left him there. 250

So when the rye-bread, nowise fine,
The King had munched, and with green wine
Had quenched his thirst, his horse he tied
Unto a post, and there beside
He fell asleep upon the brake.

But in an hour did he awake,
Astonied with an unnamed fear,
For words were ringing in his ear
Like the last echo of a scream,
"*Take! take!*" but of the vanished dream 260
No image was there left to him.
Then, trembling sore in every limb,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Did he arise, and drew his sword,
And passed forth on the forest sward,
And cautiously about he crept;
But nought at all he heard, except
Some groaning of the woodman's wife,
And forest sounds well known, but rife
With terror to the lonely soul.

Then he lay down again, to roll
His limbs within his huntsman's cloak;
And slept again, and once more woke
To tremble with that unknown fear,
And other echoing words to hear,
"*Give up! give up!*" nor anything
Showed more why these strange words should ring
About him. Then he sat upright,
Bewildered, gazing through the night,
Until his weary eyes, grown dim,
Showed not the starlit tree-trunks slim
Against the black wood, grey and plain;
And into sleep he sank again,
And woke not soon: but sleeping dreamed
That he awoke, nor other seemed
The place he woke in but that shed,
And there beside his bracken bed
He seemed to see the ancient Sage
Shrivelled yet more with untold age,
Who bending down his head to him
Said, with a mocking smile and grim,
"*Take, or give up; what matters it?*
This child new-born shall surely sit
Upon thy seat when thou art gone,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

And dwelling 'twixt straight walls of stone."

Again the King woke at that word
And sat up, panting and afeard,
And staring out into the night,
Where yet the woods thought not of light ;
And fain he was to cast off sleep,
Such visions from his eyes to keep. 300
Heavy his head grew none the less,
'Twixt wildering thoughts and weariness,
And soon he fell asleep once more,
Nor dreamed, nor woke again, before
The sun shone through the forest trees ;
And, shivering in the morning breeze,
He blinked with just-awakened eyes,
And pondering on those mysteries,
Unto the woodman's hovel went.

Him he found kneeling down, and bent 310
In moody grief above a bed,
Whereon his wife lay, stark and dead,
Whose soul near morn had passed away ;
And 'twixt the dead and living lay
A new-born man-child, fair and great.
So in the door the King did wait
To watch the man, who had no heed
Of this or that, so sore did bleed
The new-made wound within his heart.
But as the King gazed, for his part 320
He did but see his threatened foe,
And ever hard his heart did grow
With deadly hate and wilfulness :

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And sight of that poor man's distress
Made it the harder, as of nought
But that unbroken line he thought
Of which he was the last : withal
His scornful troubled eyes did fall
Upon that nest of poverty,
Where nought of joy he seemed to see.

330

On straw the poor dead woman lay ;
The door alone let in the day,
Showing the trodden earthen floor,
A board on trestles weak and poor,
Three stumps of tree for stool or chair,
A half-glazed pipkin, nothing fair,
A bowl of porridge by the wife,
Untouched by lips that lacked for life,
A platter and a bowl of wood ;
And in the further corner stood
A bow cut from the wych-elm tree,
A holly club, and arrows three
Ill pointed, heavy, spliced with thread.

340

Ah ! soothly, well remembered
Was that unblissful wretched home,
Those four bare walls, in days to come ;
And often in the coming years
He called to mind the pattering tears
That, on the rent old sackcloth cast
About the body, fell full fast,
'Twixt half-meant prayers and curses wild,
And that weak wailing of the child,
His threatened dreaded enemy,

350

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

The mighty king that was to be.

But as he gazed unsoftened there,
With hate begot of scorn and care,
Loudly he heard a great horn blow,
And his own hunting call did know,
And soon began the shouts to hear
Of his own people drawing near.

360

Then lifting up his horn, he blew
A long shrill point, but as he threw
His head aback, beheld his folk,
Who from the close-set thicket broke
And o'er the cleared space swiftly passed,
With shouts that he was found at last.

Then turned the carle his doleful face,
And slowly rising in his place,
Drew thwart his eyes his fingers strong,
And on that gay-dressed glittering throng
Gazed stupidly, as still he heard
The name of King ; but said no word.

370

But his guest spoke, "Sirs, well be ye !
This luckless woodman, whom ye see,
Gave me good harbour through the night
And such poor victual as he might ;
Therefore shall he have more than gold
For his reward ; since dead and cold
His helpmate lies who last night died.
See now the youngling by her side ;
Him will I take and rear him so
That he shall no more lie alow
In straw, or from the beech-tree dine,
But rather use white linen fine

380

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And silver plate ; and with the sword
Shall learn to serve some King or Lord.
How say'st thou, good man ? ”

“ Sire,” he said,

Weeping, but shamefaced, “ since here dead
She lies, that erst kept house for me,
E'en as thou wilt let it be ;
Though I had hoped to have a son
To help me get the day's work done.
And now, indeed, forth must he go
If unto manhood he should grow,
And lonely I must wander forth,
To whom east, west, and south, and north
Are all alike : forgive it me
If little thanks I give to thee
Who scarce can thank great God in heaven
For what is left of what was given.”

Small heed unto him the King gave,
But trembling in his haste to have
The body of his enemy,
Said to an old squire, “ Bring to me
The babe, and give the good man this
Wherewith to gain a little bliss,
In place of all his troubles gone,
Nor need he now be long alone.”

The carle's rough face, at clink of gold,
Lit up, though still did he behold
The wasted body lying there ;
But stooping, a rough box, foursquare,
Made of old wood and lined with hay,
Wherein the helpless infant lay,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

He raised, and gave it to the squire
Who on the floor cast down his hire,
Nor sooth dared murmur aught the while,
But turning smiled a grim hard smile
To see the carle his pieces count
Still weeping: so did all men mount 420
And turning round into the wood
Forgot him and his drearihood,
And soon were far off from the hut.

Then coming out, the door he shut
Behind him, and adown a glade,
Towards a rude hermitage he made
To fetch the priest unto his need,
To bury her and say her bede.
So when all things that he might do
Were done aright, heavy with woe, 430
He left the woodland hut behind
To take such chance as he might find
In other lands, forgetting all
That in that forest did befall.

But through the wild wood rode the King,
Moody and thinking on the thing,
And weighted yet by hovering fear;
Till now, when they had drawn anear
The open country, and could see
The road run on from close to lea, 440
And lastly by a wooden bridge
A long way from that heathy ridge
Cross over a deep lowland stream,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then in his eyes there came a gleam,
And his hand fell upon his sword,
And turning round to squire and lord
He said, "Ride, sirs, the way is clear,
Nor of my people have I fear,
Nor do my foes range over wide;
And for myself fain would I ride
Right slowly homewards through the fields
Noting what this and that one yields;
While by my squire who bears the child
Lightly my way shall be beguiled.
For some nurse now he needs must have
This tender life of his to save;
And doubtless by the stream there is
Some house where he may dwell in bliss,
Till he grow old enough to learn
How gold and glory he may earn;
And grow, perchance, to be a lord."

With downcast eyes he spoke that word;
But forth they galloped speedily,
And he drew rein and stood to see
Their green coats lessening as they went.
This man unto the other bent,
Until mid dust and haze at last
Into a wavering mass they passed;
Then 'twixt the hedgerows vanished quite
Just told of by the dust-cloud white
Rolled upwards 'twixt the elm-trunks slim.

Then turned the King about to him
Who held the child, noting again

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

The thing wherein he first had lain,
And on one side of it could see
A lion painted hastily
In red upon a ground of white,
As though of old it had been dight
For some lord's rough-wrought palisade;
But naked 'mid the hay was laid 480
The child, and had no mark or sign.

Then said the King, "My ancient line
Thou and thy sires through good and ill
Have served, and unto thee my will
Is law enough from day to day;
Ride nigh me hearkening what I say."

He shook his rein and side by side
Down through the meadows did they ride,
And opening all his heart, the King
Told to the old man everything 490
Both of the Sage, and of his dream;
Withal, drawn nigh unto the stream,
He said, "Yet this shall never be;
For surely as thou lovest me,
Adown this water shall he float
With this rough box for ark and boat.
Then if mine old line he must spill
There let God save him if He will,
While I in no case shed his blood."

"Yea," said the squire, "thy words are good, 500
For the whole sin shall lie on me,
Who greater things would do for thee
If need there were; yet note, I pray,
It may be he will 'scape this day

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And live; and what wouldst thou do then
If thou shouldst meet him amongst men?
I counsel thee to let him go
Since sure to nought thy will shall grow."

"Yea, yea," the King said, "let all be
That may be, if I once but see 510
This ark whirl in the eddies swift
Or tangled in the autumn drift
And wrong side up:" but with that word
Their horse-hoofs on the plank he heard,
And swift across the bridge he rode,
And nigh the end of it abode,
Then turned to watch the old squire stop,
And leaning o'er the bridge-rail drop
The luckless child; he heard withal
A muttered word and splashing fall 520
And from the wakened child a cry,
And saw the cradle hurrying by,
Whirled round and sinking, but as yet
Holding the child, nor overset.

Now somewhat, soothly, at the sight
Did the King doubt if he outright
Had rid him of his feeble foe,
But frowning did he turn to go
Unto his home, nor knew indeed
How better he might help his need; 530
And as unto his house he rode
Full little care for all he showed,
But bade stark Samuel the squire
Unto his bridle-hand ride nigher,
And talk to him of careless things,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

As unto such will talk great kings.

But when unto his palace gate
He came at last, thereby did wait
The chamberlain with eager eyes
Above his lips grown grave with lies, 540
In haste to tell him that the Queen,
While in the wild-wood he had been,
Had borne a daughter unto him
Strong, fair of face, and straight of limb.
So well at ease and glad thereat
His troubled dream he nigh forgot,
His troubled waking, and the ride
Unto the fateful river-side;
Or thought of all as little things
Unmeet to trouble souls of kings. 550

So passed the days, so passed the years
In such-like hopes, and such-like fears,
And such-like deeds in field and hall
As unto royal men befall;
And fourteen years have passed away
Since on the huddled brake he lay
And dreamed that dream, remembered now
Once and again, when slow and slow
The minutes of some sleepless night
Crawl toward the dawning of the light. 560

Remembered not on this sweet morn
When to the ringing of the horn,
Jingle of bits and mingled shout
Toward that same stream he rideth out

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

To see his grey-winged falcons fly.

So long he rode he drew anigh
A mill upon the river's brim,
That seemed a goodly place to him,
For o'er the oily smooth millhead
There hung the apples growing red,
And many an ancient apple-tree
Within the orchard could he see,
While the smooth mill walls white and black
Shook to the great wheel's measured clack,
And grumble of the gear within ;
While o'er the roof that dulled that din
The doves sat crooning half the day,
And round the half-cut stack of hay
The sparrows fluttered twittering.

570

There smiling stayed the joyous King,
And since the autumn noon was hot
Thought good anigh the pleasant spot
To dine that day, and therewith sent
To tell the miller his intent :
Who held the stirrup of the King,
Bareheaded, joyful at the thing,
While from his horse he lit adown,
Then led him o'er an elm-beam brown,
New cut in February tide,
That crossed the stream from side to side.
So underneath the apple-trees
The King sat careless, well at ease
And ate and drank right merrily.

580

590

To whom the miller drew anigh
Among the courtièrs, bringing there

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Such as he could of country fare,
Green yellowing plums from off his wall,
Wasp-bitten pears, the first to fall
From off the wavering spire-like tree,
Junkets, and cream and fresh honey. 600

Smiling the King regarded him,
For he was round-paunched, short of limb,
Red-faced, with long, lank flaxen hair ;
But with him was a boy, right fair,
Grey-eyed, and yellow-haired, most like
Unto some Michael who doth strike
The dragon on a minster wall,
So sweet-eyed was he, and withal
So fearless of all things he seemed.
But when he saw him the King deemed 610
He scarce could be the miller's kin,
And laughing said, "Hast thou within
Thy dusty mill the dame who bore
This stripling in the days of yore,
For fain were I to see her now,
If she be liker him than thou?"

"Sire," said the miller, "that may be,
And thou my dame shalt surely see ;
But for the stripling, neither I
Begot him, nor my wife did lie 620
In labour when the lad was born,
But as an outcast and forlorn
We found him fourteen years to-day,
So quick the time has worn away."

Then the King, hearkening what he said,
A vanished day remembered,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And troubled grew his face thereat ;
But while he thought of this and that
The man turned from him and was gone
And by him stood the lad alone ; 630
At whom he gazed, and as their eyes
Met, a great horror 'gan arise
Within his heart, and back he shrank
And shuddering a deep draught he drank,
Scarce knowing if his royal wine
He touched, or juice of some hedge-vine.

But as his eyes he lifted up
From off his jewelled golden cup,
Once more the miller drew anigh,
By whom his wife went timidly 640
Bearing some burden in her hand ;
So when before him she did stand
And he beheld her worn and old,
And black-haired, then that hair of gold,
Grey eyes, firm lips, and round cleft chin,
Brought stronger memory of his sin.

But the carle spake, " Dame, tell the King
How this befell, a little thing
The thoughts of such great folk to hold ;
Speak out, and fear not to be bold." 650

" My tale," she said, " is short enow,
For this day fourteen years ago
Along this river-side I rode
From market to our poor abode,
Where dwelt we far from other men,
Since thinner was the country then
Than now it is ; so as I went

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

And wearied o'er my panniers bent,
From out the stream a feeble cry
I heard, and therewith presently
From off my mule's back could I see
This boy who standeth here by thee,
A naked, new-born infant, laid
In a rough ark that had been stayed
By a thick tangled bed of weed ;
So pitying the youngling's need,
Dismounting, did I wade for him
Waist deep, whose ark now scarce did swim ;
And he, with cold, and misery,
And hunger, was at point to die.

“ Withal, I bare him to the mill
And cherished him, and had good will
To bring the babe up as mine own ;
Since childless were we and alone,
And no one came to father it.
So oft have I rejoiced to sit
Beside the fire and watch him play.
And now, behold him !—but some day
I look to lose him, for, indeed,
I deem he comes of royal seed,
Unmeet for us ; and now, my lord,
Hast thou heard every foolish word
About my son—this boy—whose name
Is Michael soothly, since he came
To us this day nigh Michaelmas.
—See, sire, the ark wherein he was !
Which I have kept.”

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Therewith she drew
A cloth away ; but the King knew,
Long ere she moved, what he should see,
Nor looked, but seeming carelessly 690
Leaned on the board and hid his eyes.
But at the last did he arise
And saw the painted lion red,
Not faded, well remembered ;
Withal he thought, " And who of these
Were with me then amongst the trees
To see this box ? " but presently
He thought again that none but he
And the grey squire, old Samuel,
That painting could have noted well, 700
Since Samuel his cloak had cast
About it, and therewith had passed
Throughout the forest on that day,
And not till all were well away
Had drawn it off before the King.
But changed and downcast at the thing
He left the lovely autumn place,
Still haunted by the new-found face
Of his old foe, and back he rode
Unto his ancient rich abode 710
Forcing but dismal merriment
As midst his smiling lords he went ;
Who yet failed not to note his mood,
So changed : and some men of the wood
Remembered them, but said not aught,
Yea, trembled lest their hidden thought
Some bird should learn and carry it.

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

The morrow come, the King did sit
Alone, to talk with Samuel,
Who yet lived, gathering wage for hell. 720
He from the presence in a while
Came forth, and with his ugly smile
He muttered, "Well betide me, then,
St. Peter! they are lucky men
Who serve no kings, since they indeed
May damn themselves each for his need.
And will not he outlive this day
Whom the deep water could not slay,
Ere yet his lips had tasted food?"
With that a horse, both strong and good, 730
He gat of the King's equerry,
And toward the mill rode speedily.

There Michael by the mill-tail lay,
Watching the swift stream snatch away
His float from midst the careless dace;
But thinking of the thin, dark face,
That yesterday all men he saw
Gaze at with seeming love and awe;
Nor had he, wondering at the lords,
Lost one word of the housewife's words; 740
And still he noted that the King
Beheld him as a wondrous thing,
Strange to find there: so in his heart
He thought to play some royal part
In this wild play of life, and made
Stories, wherein great words he said,
And did great deeds in desperate fight.
But midst these thoughts there came in sight

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

He who had carried him of yore,
From out the woodman's broken door, 750
Dressed like a king's man, with fine gold
Touching his hard brown hands and old,
So was his sleeve embroidered ;
A plumed hat had he on his head,
And by his side a cutting sword
Fit for the girdle of a lord ;
And round his neck a knife he bore,
The hilt whereof was figured o'er
With green leaves on a golden ground,
Whose stem a silver scroll enwound ; 760
Charged with these letters, writ in black,
Strike ! for no dead man cometh back !

The boy gazed at him earnestly,
With beating heart, as he drew nigh.
And when at last he drew his rein
Beside him, thought that not in vain
His dream might be. But Samuel
Below his breath said ; " Surely well
Shalt thou fulfil thy destiny ;
And, spite of all, thou wilt not die 770
Till thou hast won the arched crown."

But with that word he lighted down,
And said aloud, " Lad, tell to me
Where the good miller I may see,
For from the King I come to-day,
And have a word of his to say ;
I think, indeed, concerning thee ;
For surely thou his lad must be."
Then Michael leapt up, nor took heed

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Of how the nibbling dace might feed 780
Upon the loose ends of his bait ;

“ Fair sir,” he said, “ my sire doth wait
Until men bring his mare from grass,
For to the good town will he pass,
Since he has need of household gear ;
Follow, my lord, the place is here.”

Withal, the good steed being made fast,
Unto the other side they passed,
And by the door the miller found,
Who bowed before him to the ground, 790
And asked what he would have him do.
Then from his bosom Samuel drew
A scroll, and said, “ Good friend, read here,
And do my bidding without fear
Of doing ill.”

“ Sir,” said the man,
“ But little lettered skill I can ;
Let my dame come, for she can read
Well-written letters at good need.”

“ Nay, friend,” he said, “ suffice it thee 800
This seal at the scroll’s end to see,
My lord the King’s ; and hear my word,
That I come hither from my lord
Thy foundling lad to have away
To serve the King from this same day.”

Downcast the miller looked thereat,
And twisting round his dusty hat,
Said, “ Well, my lord, so must it be,
Nor is he aught akin to me,
Nor seems so : none the less would I

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Have left him, when I came to die, 810
All things I have, with this my mill,
Wherein he hath no 'prentice skill,
Young as he is: and surely here
Might he have lived, with little fear,
A life of plenty and of bliss—
Near by, too, a fair maid there is,
I looked should be good wife to him."

Meanwhile young Michael's head 'gan swim
With thoughts of noble life and praise;
And he forgot the happy days 820
Wherein the happy dreams he dreamed
That now so near fulfilment seemed;
And, looking through the open mill,
Stared at the grey and windy hill
And saw it not, but some fair place
Made strange with many a changing face,
And all his life that was to be.

But Samuel, laughing scornfully,
Said, "O good soul, thou thinkest then
This is a life for well-born men, 830
As deems our lord this youngling is—
Tell me, good lad, where lies thy bliss?"

But Michael turned shamefaced and red,
Waked from his dream, and stammering said,
"Fair sir, my life is sweet and good,
And John, the ranger of the wood,
Saith that I draw so good a bow,
That I shall have full skill enow
Ere many months have passed me by

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

To join the muster, and to try 840
To win the bag of florins white,
That folk, on Barnaby the bright,
Shoot for within the market town.

Sir, please you to look up and down
The weedy reaches of our stream,
And note the bubbles of the bream,
And see the great chub take the fly,
And watch the long pike basking lie
Outside the shadow of the weed.

Withal there come unto our need 850
Woodcock and snipe when swallows go ;
And now the water-hen flies low
With feet that well-nigh touch the reeds,
And plovers cry about the meads,
And the stares chatter ; certes, sir,
It is a fair place all the year."

Eyeing him grimly, Samuel said,
"Thou show'st churl's breeding, by my head,
In foul despite of thy fair face !

Take heart, for to a better place 860

Thou goest now.—Miller, farewell,

Nor need'st thou to the neighbours tell

The noble fortunes of the lad ;

For, certes, he shall not be glad

To know them in a year or twain.

Yet shall thy finding not be vain,

And thou mayst bless it ; for behold

This bag wherein is store of gold ;

Take it and let thy hinds go play,

And grind no corn for many a day, 870

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For it would buy thy mill and thee."

He turned to go, but pensively
Stood Michael, for his broken dream
Doubtful and far away did seem
Amidst the squire's rough mockeries ;
And tears were gathering in his eyes.
But the kind miller's rough farewell
Rang in his ears ; and Samuel
Stamped with his foot and plucked his sleeve ;
So therewithal he turned to leave 880
His old abode, the quiet place,
Trembling, with wet and tearful face.

But even as he turned there came
From out the house the simple dame
And cast rough arms about the lad,
Saying, "For that I have been glad
By means of thee this many a day,
My mourning heart this hour doth pay.
But, fair son, may'st thou live in bliss,
And die in peace ; remembering this, 890
When thou art come to high estate,
That in our house, early and late,
The happy house that shall be sad,
Thou hadst the best of all we had
And love unfeigned from us twain,
Whose hearts thou madest young again,
Hearts that the quicker old shall grow
Now thou art gone."

"Good dame, enow,"

Quoth Samuel, "the day grows late,
And sure the King for meat shall wait 900

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Until he see this new-found lord."
He strode away upon that word ;
And half ashamed, and half afeard,
Yet eager as his dream he neared,
Shyly the lad went after him.
They crossed the stream and by its brim
Both mounted the great warhorse grey,
And without word they rode away.

But as along the river's edge
They went, and brown birds in the sedge 910
Twittered their sweet and formless tune
In the fair autumn afternoon,
And reach by reach the well-known stream
They passed, again the hopeful dream
Of one too young to think death near,
Who scarce had learned the name of fear,
Remorseful memories put to flight ;
Lovely the whole world showed and bright..
Nor did the harsh voice rouse again
The thought of mockery or of pain, 920
For other thoughts held Samuel.

So, riding silently and well,
They reached at last the dusty road
That led unto the King's abode.
But Samuel turned away his face
Therefrom, and at a steady pace
The great horse thundered o'er the bridge,
And made on toward the heathy ridge,
Wherefrom they rode that other day.
But Michael, noting well the way, 930

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Why thus they went, fell wondering,
And said aloud, "Dwells then the King,
Fair sir, as now within the wood?"

"Young fool, where that it seems him good
He dwelleth," quoth old Samuel,
"And now it pleaseth him to dwell
With the black monks across the wood."

Withal he muttered in his hood,
"Curst be the King, and thou also,
Who thrust me out such deeds to do, 940
When I should bide at home to pray,
Who draw so nigh my ending day."
So saying, forth his horse he spurred
And to himself said yet this word,
"Yea, yea, and of all days forlorn
God curse the day when I was born."

Therewith he groaned; yet saying thus
His case seemed hard and piteous,
When he remembered how of old
Another tale he might have told. 950

So as each thought his own thoughts still,
The horse began to breast the hill,
And still they went on higher ground,
Until as Michael turned him round
He saw the sunny country-side
Spread out before him far and wide,
Golden amidst its waning green,
Joyous with varied life unseen.
Meanwhile from side to side of them
The trees began their way to hem, 960
As still he gazed from tree to tree,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

And when he turned back presently
He saw before him like a wall
Uncounted tree-trunks dim and tall.
Then with their melancholy sound
The odorous spruce-woods met around
Those wayfarers, and when he turned
Once more, far off the sunlight burned
In star-like spots, while from o'erhead
Dim twilight through the boughs was shed. 970

Not there as yet had Michael been,
Nor had he left the meadows green
Dotted about with spreading trees,
And fresh with sun and rain and breeze,
For those mirk woods, and now his eyes
Gazed round about for mysteries.
Since many an old wife's tale he knew ;
Huge woodcutters in raiment blue,
The remnant of a mighty race, 980
The ancient masters of the place,
And hammering trolls he looked to see,
And dancers of the faërie,
Who, as the ancient stories told,
In front were lovely to behold,
But empty shells seen from behind.

So on they rode until the wind
Had died out, stifled by the trees,
And Michael 'mid those images
Of strange things made alive by fear,
Grew drowsy in the forest drear ; 990
Nor noted how the time went past
Until they nigh had reached at last

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The borders of the spruce-tree wood ;
And with a tingling of the blood
Samuel bethought him of the day
When turned about the other way
He carried him he rode with now.
For the firs ended on the brow
Of a rough gravelly hill, and there
Lay a small valley nowise fair
Beneath them, clear at first of all
But brake, till amid rushes tall
Down in the bottom alders grew
Crabbed and rough ; and winding through
The clayey mounds a brook there was
Oozy and foul, half choked with grass.

1000

There now the squire awhile drew rein,
And noted how the ground again
Rose up upon the other side,
And saw a green glade opening wide
'Twixt oaks and hollies, and he knew
Full well what place it led unto ;
Withal he heard the bittern's boom,
And though without the fir-wood's gloom
They now were come, yet red and low
The sun above the trees did show,
And in despite of hardihead,
The old squire had a mortal dread
Of lying in the wood alone
When that was done that should be done.

1010

1020

Now Michael, wakened by the wind,
Clutched tighter at the belt behind,
And with wide eyes was staring round,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

When Samuel said, "Get to the ground,
My horse shall e'en sink deep enow
Without thy body, in this slough;
And haste thee, or we both shall lie
Beneath the trees, and be as dry
As autumn dew can make us. Haste!
The time is short for thee to waste."

1030

Then from the horse the boy did glide,
And slowly down the valley side
They went, and Michael, wakened now,
Sang such rude songs as he might know,
Grown fresh and joyous of his life;
While Samuel, clutching at the knife
About his neck that hung, again
Down in the bottom tightened rein,
And turning, in a hoarse voice spake,
"My girths are loosening, come and take
The straps and draw them tighter, lad."

1040

Then Michael stayed his carol glad,
And noting little in his mirth
The other's voice, unto the girth
Without a word straight set his hand:
But as with bent head he did stand,
Straining to tighten what was tight,
In Samuel's hand the steel flashed bright,
And fell, deep smitten in his side;
Then, leaping back, the poor lad cried,
As if for help, and staggering fell,
With wide eyes fixed on Samuel;
Who none the less grown deadly pale,
Lit down, lest that should not avail

1050

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

To slay him, and beside him knelt,
And since his eyes were closed now, felt
His heart that beat yet : therewithal
His hand upon the knife did fall.

But, ere his fingers clutched it well,
Far off he seemed to hear a bell,
And trembling knelt upright again,
And listening, listened not in vain,
For clear he heard a tinkling sound.

1060

Then to his horse from off the ground
He leapt, nor reasoned with his dread
But thought the angel of the dead
Was drawing nigh the slayer to slay,
Ere scarce the soul had passed away.

One dreadful moment yet he heard
That bell, then like a madman spurred
His noble horse ; that, maddened too,
The close-set fir-wood galloped through,
Not stayed by any stock or stone,
Until, the furious race being done,
Anigh the bridge he fell down dead ;
And Samuel, mazed with guilt and dread,
Wandered afoot throughout the night,
But came, at dawning of the light,
Half-dead unto the palace gate.

1070

There till the opening did he wait ;
Then, by the King's own signet-ring,
He gained the chamber of the King,
And painfully what he had done
He told, and how the thing had gone.
And said withal : " Yet is he dead,

1080

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

And surely that which made my dread
Shall give thee joy : for doubt not aught
That bell the angels to him brought,
That he in Abraham's breast might lie—
So ends, O King, the prophecy.”

1090

Nathless the King scowled, ill content,
And said, “I deemed that I had sent
A man of war to do my will,
Who lacked for neither force nor skill,
And thou com'st with a woman's face,
Bewildered with thy desperate race,
And made an idiot with thy fear,
Nor bring'st me any token here!”

Therewith he rose and gat away,
But brooding on it through that day,
Thought that all things went not so ill
As first he deemed, and that he still
Might leave his old line flourishing.
Therewith both gold and many a thing
Unto old Samuel he gave,
But failed thereby his life to save ;
Who, not so old in years as sin,
Died ere the winter, and within
The minster choir was laid asleep,
With carven saints his head to keep.

1100

1110

And so the days and years went by,
And still in great felicity
The King dwelt, wanting only this—
A son wherewith to share his bliss,
And reign when he was dead and gone ;
Nor had he daughter, save that one

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Born on the night when Michael first,
Forlorn, alone, and doubly cursed,
Felt on him this world's bitter air.

This daughter, midst fair maids most fair, 1120
Was not yet wed, though at this time,
Being come unto her maiden's prime,
She looked upon her eighteenth May.

Midst this her mother passed away,
Not much lamented of the King,
Who had the thought of marrying
Some dame more fertile, and who sent
A wily man with this intent
To spy the countries out and find
Some great king's daughter, wise and kind, 1130
And fresh, and fair, in face and limb,
In all things a fit mate for him.

So in short time it came to pass
Again the King well wedded was,
And hoped once more to have a son.

And when this fair dame he had won,
A year in peace he dwelt with her,
Until the time was drawing near
When first his eyes beheld that foe
Dead as he deemed these years ago. 1140
Now at that time, as custom was,
His daughter was about to pass
Unto a distant house of his,
Built by some king for worldly bliss
In ancient days: there, far removed
From courts or towns, his dame beloved
The dead king had been wont to see

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Play mid the summer greenery,
Or like Erigone of old
Stand in the vineyards girt with gold, 1150
To queen it o'er the vintagers,
Half worshipping that face of hers.
Long years ago these folk were passed,
Their crimes forgotten, or else cast
Into the glowing crucible
Of time, that tempers all things well,
That maketh pleasure out of pain,
And out of ruin golden gain;
Nathless, unshaken still, there stood
The towers and ramparts red as blood 1160
Wherein their lives had passed away;
And still the lovely gardens lay
About them, changed, but smiling still,
As in past time, on good or ill.

Thither the Princess Cecily
Must go awhile in peace to be;
For now, midst care, and doubt, and toil,
Proud words drawn back, and half-healed broil,
The King had found one meet to wed
His daughter, of great goodlihead, 1170
Wealth, and unbroken royalty.
And now he said to her, when she
Was setting out for that fair place,
"O daughter, thou shalt see my face
Before a month is fully gone,
Nor wilt thou see me then alone;
For that man shall be with me then,
Whom I have chosen from all men

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

To hold the treasure of my life.
Full sore he longs to see his wife, 1186
Nor needst thou fear him for thy part
Who holdeth many a woman's heart
As the net holds the silvery fish.
Farewell—and all that thou may'st wish
I pray God grant thee."

Therewithal

He kissed her, and from out the hall
She passed, not shamefaced, or afraid
Of what might happen ; though, indeed,
Her heart of no man's heart had need
To make her happy, as she thought. 1190

Ever the new sun daily brought
Fresh joy of life to her bedside.
The world before her open wide
Was spread, a place for joy and bliss.
Her lips had trembled with no kiss,
Wherewith love slayeth fear and shame ;
Her grey eyes, conscious of no blame,
Beheld unmoved the eyes of men ;
Her hearing grew no dimmer when
Some unused footstep she might hear : 1200
And unto no man was she dear,
But as some goddess might have been
When Greek men worshipped many a queen.

Now with her armed folk forth she rode
Unto that ancient fair abode,
And while the lark sung o'er the corn,
Love gilded not the waning morn ;

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

And when the sun rose high above,
High thoughts she thought, but not of love ;
And when that sun the world did leave, 1210
He left no love to light the eve.
The moon no melancholy brought,
The dawn no vain, remorseful thought.
But all untroubled her sweet face
Passed 'neath the gate of that old place,
And there her bridegroom she abode.

But scarce was she upon the road
Ere news unto the King was brought
That Peter, the old Abbot, sought
To see him, having newly come 1220
From the wild place that was his home
Across the forest ; so the King
Bade him to enter, well willing
To hear what he might have to say ;
Who, entering the great hall straightway,
Had with him an old, reverend man,
The sub-prior, Father Adrian,
And five monks more, and therewithal
Ten of his folk, stout men and tall,
Who bore armed staves and coats of fence. 1230

So, when he came to audience,
He prayed the King of this or that,
Whereof my tale-teller forgat,
And graciously the King heard all,
And said at last, " Well, what may fall,
Thou go'st not hence, fair lord, to-day ;
Unless in vain a king must pray,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Thou and thy monks shall eat with me ;
While feast thine axe-men merrily."

Withal, he eyed the Abbot's folk
In careless mood, then once more spoke,
"Tall men thou feedest, by the rood !
Lord Abbot ; come they from the wood ?
Dwell many more such thereabout ?
Fain were I such should swell the shout
When I am armed, and rank meets rank."

1240

But as he spoke his loud voice sank
Wavering, nor heard he aught at all
Of the faint noises of the hall,
Or what the monk in answer said ;
For, looking from a steel-clad head,
Those eyes again did he behold,
That erst from 'neath the locks of gold
Kindly and bold, but soft with awe,
Beneath the apple-boughs he saw.

1250

But when thereof he surely knew,
Pale to the very lips he grew ;
Till gathering heart within a while
With the faint semblance of a smile,
He seemed to note the Abbot's words
That he heard not ; then from the lords
He turned, and facing Michael said,
"Raise up the steel cap from thine head,
That I may see if thou look'st bold ;
Methinks, I know thy face of old,
Whence com'st thou ?"

1260

Michael lifted straight
From off his brow the steel cap's weight,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

And showed the bright locks curling round
His fresh and ruddy face, sun-browned,
And in a voice clear as a bell 1270
Told all his story, till he fell
Sore wounded in that dismal vale,
And said withal, "My lord, the tale
Of what came after, none knoweth
Better than he, who, from ill death
Saved me that tide, and made me man,
My lord, the sub-prior Adrian."

"Speak on then, father," quoth the King,
Making as he was hearkening.

"My lord," said Adrian, "I, who then 1280
Was but a server of poor men
Outside our Abbey walls, one day
Was called by one in poor array,
A charcoal-burner's lad, who said
That soon his father would be dead,
And that of all things he would have
His rights, that he his soul might save.
I made no tarrying at that word,
But took between mine hands the Lord,
And bade the boy bear forth the bell ; 1290
For though few folk there were to tell
Who passed that way, nathless, I trow
The beasts were glad that news to know.

"Well, by the pinewood's skirts we went
While through its twilight the bell sent
A heavenly tinkling ; but the lad
'Gan telling me of fears he had
Of elves who dwell within the wood.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

I chid him thereat, as was good,
Bidding him note Whom in mine hands 1300
I held, The Ransom of all Lands.
But as the firwood's dim twilight
Waxed into day, and fair and bright
The evening sun showed through the trees,
Our ears fanned by the evening breeze
The galloping of horse-hoofs heard,
Wherewith my page hung back afeard
Of elves and such-like; but I said,
'Wilt thou thy father should be dead
Ere we can reach him? O my son, 1310
Fear not that aught can stay This One.'

"Therewith I smote my mule, and he
Ran forward with me hastily
As fearing to be left behind.
Well, as we went, what should we find
Down by the stream, but this my son,
Who seemed as though his days were done;
For in his side a knife there stood
Wherefrom ran out a stream of blood,
Soaking the grass and water-mint; 1320
Then, I dismounting, we by dint
Of all our strength the poor youth laid
Upon my mule, and down a glade
Of oaks and hollies then we passed,
And reached the woodman's home at last;
A poor hut, built of wattled wood,
And by its crooked gable stood
A ruinous shed, unroofed and old,
That beasts of burden once did hold.

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

—Thyself, my lord, mayst know it well, 1330
Since thereabout the wild swine dwell ;
And hart, and hind, and roe are there—
So the lad's wounds I staunched with care
Forthwith, and then the man I shrived,
Who none the less got well and lived
For many a day : then back I went
And the next day our leech I sent
With drugs to tend upon the lad,
Who soon was as he ne'er had had
A hurt at all : and he being well 1340
We took him in our house to dwell,
And taught him letters, and, indeed,
Before long, Latin could he read
As well as I ; but hath no will
To turn unto religion still.
Yet is he good and doth no wrong ;
And being thereto both hale and strong,
My lord, the Abbot, sayeth of him,
' He shall serve God with heart and limb,
Not heart and voice.' Therefore, my lord, 1350
Thou seest him armed with spear and sword
For their defence who feed him still,
Teach him, and guard his soul from ill.
Ho, Michael ! hast thou there with thee
The fair-wrought knife I first did see
Deep in thy side ?—there, show it now
Unto the King, that he may know
Our tale is not a thing of nought."
Withal the King, with eyes distraught
Amidst his anxious face and pale, 1360

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Sat leaning forward through this tale,
Scarce noting here and there a word.
But all being told, at last he heard
His own voice changed, and harsh, and low,
That said, "Fair lord, I fain would know,
Since this your man-at-arms seems true,
What thing will he be worth to you ;
For better had he wear my rose
Than loiter in your Abbey-close,
Poring o'er books no man can read." 1370

"O sire!" the monk said, "if thy need
Be great of such men, let him go ;
My men-at-arms need make no show
Of fairness, nor should ladies miss,
E'en as thou say'st, such men as this."

Laughing he spoke ; the King the while
His pale face puckering to a smile ;
Then, as in some confused dream,
In Michael's hand he saw the gleam
Of that same steel remembered well, 1380
The gift he gave to Samuel ;
Drawn from his father's ancient chest
To do that morn his own behest.

And as he now beheld its sheen,
The twining stem of gold and green,
The white scroll with the letters black,
Strike ! for no dead man cometh back !
He hardened yet his heart once more,
And grown unhappy as before,
When last he had that face in sight, 1390
Now for the third time come to light,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Once more was treacherous, fierce, and fell.

Now was the Abbot feasted well
With all his folk, then went away,
But Michael clad in rich array
Became the King's man, and was thought
By all most happy, to be brought
Unto such hopeful fair estate.

For ten days yet the King did wait,
Which past, for Michael did he send, 1400
And he being come, said to him, "Friend,
Take now this letter from my hand
And go unto our southern land ;
My captain Hugh shall go with thee
For one day's journey, then shall he
Tell thee which way thou hast to ride ;
The third day thence about noontide
If thou dost well, thou shouldst be close
Unto my Castle of the Rose
Where dwells my daughter ; needs it is 1410
That no man living should see this
Until that thou within my wall
Hast given it to the seneschal ;
Be wise and wary then, that thou
Mayst think of this that happeneth now
As birthday to thine high estate."

So said he, knowing not that fate
Was dealing otherwise than he.

But Michael going, presently
Met Hugh, a big man rough and black, 1420
And who of nought but words had lack.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

With him he mounted, and set forth
And daylong rode on from the north.

Now if the King had hope that Hugh
Some deed like Samuel's might do
I know not ; certes nought he said
To that hard heart and narrow head,
Who knew no wiles but wiles of war,
And was as true as such men are ;
Yet had there been a tale to tell
If Michael had not held him well,
And backward still the wrath had turned
Wherewith his heart not seldom burned
At scornful words his fellow said.

1430

At last they reached cross-ways that led
One west, one southward still, whereat
Hugh, taking off his feathered hat,
Bowed low in scorn, and said, " Fair sir,
Unto the westward must I spur,
While you go southward, soon to get,
I doubt not, an earl's coronet ;
Farewell, my lord, and yet beware
Thou dost not at my lady stare
Too hard, lest thou shouldst plumb the moat,
Or have a halter round thy throat."

1440

But Michael to his scoff said nought,
But upon high things set his thought
As his departing hooves he heard,
And still betwixt the hedgerows spurred.
And when the twilight was o'erpast
At a small inn drew rein at last,
And slept that night as such folk can ;

145

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

And while next morn the thrushes ran
Their first course through the autumn dew
The gossamers did he dash through,
And on his way rode steadily
The live-long day, nor yet was he
Alone, as well might be that day,
Since a fair town was in his way.
Stout hinds he passed, and yeomen good, 1460
And friars of the heavy hood,
And white-coifed housewives mounted high
Above their maunds, while merrily
The well-shod damsel trudged along
Beside them, sending forth a song
As little taught as is a bird's;
And goodmen, goodwives, priests, and herds,
And merry maids failed not to send
Good wishes for his journey's end
Athwart him as still on he sped, 1470
Free from all evil thoughts or dread.

Withal again the day went by,
And in that city's hostelry
He slept, and by the dawn of day
Next morn again was on his way,
And leaving the scarce wakened street
The newly risen sun did greet
With cheerful heart. His way wound on
Still up and up till he had won
Up to a great hill's chalky brow, 1480
Whence looking back he saw below
The town spread out, church, square, and street,
And baily, crawling up the feet

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Of the long yew-besprinkled hill ;
And in the fragrant air and still,
Seeming to gain new life from it,
The doves from roof to roof did flit :
The early fires sent up their smoke
That seemed to him to tell of folk
New wakened unto great delight : 1490
For he upon that morning bright
So joyous felt, so free from pain,
He seemed as he were born again
Into some new immortal state
That knew no envy, fear, or hate.

Now the road turned to his left hand
And led him through a table-land,
Windy and barren of all grain ;
But where a hollow specked the plain
The yew-trees hugged the sides of it, 1500
And mid them did the woodlark flit
Or sang well sheltered from the wind.
And all about the sheep did find
Sweet grass, the while the shepherd's song
Rang clear as Michael sped along.

Long time he rode, till suddenly,
When now the sun was broad and high,
From out a hollow where the yew
Still guarded patches of the dew,
He rode and saw that he had won 1510
That highland's edge, and gazed upon
A valley that beneath the haze
Of that most fair of autumn days,
Showed glorious ; fair with golden sheaves,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Rich with the darkened autumn-leaves,
Gay with the water-meadows green,
The bright blue streams that lay between,
The miles of beauty stretched away
From that bleak hill-side bare and grey,
Till white cliffs over slopes of vine 1520
Drew 'gainst the sky a broken line.
And 'twixt the vineyards and the stream
Michael saw gilded spirelets gleam ;
For, hedged with many a flowery close,
There lay the Castle of the Rose,
His hurried journey's aim and end.

Then downward he began to wend,
And 'twixt the flowery hedges sweet
He heard the hook smite down the wheat,
And murmur of the unseen folk ; 1530
But when he reached the stream that broke
The golden plain, but leisurely
He passed the bridge, for he could see
The masters of that ripening realm,
Cast down beneath an ancient elm
Upon a little strip of grass,
From hand to hand the pitcher pass,
While on the turf beside them lay
The ashen-handled sickles grey,
The matters of their cheer between : 1540
Slices of white cheese, specked with green,
And green-striped onions and ryebread,
And summer apples faintly red
Even beneath the crimson skin,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And yellow grapes, well ripe and thin,
Plucked from the cottage gable-end.

And certes Michael felt their friend
Hearing their voices, nor forgot
His boyhood and the pleasant spot
Beside the well-remembered stream ; 1550
And friendly did this water seem
As through its white-flowered weeds it ran
Bearing good things to beast and man.

Yea, as the parapet he passed,
And they a greeting toward him cast,
Once more he felt a boy again ;
As though beneath the harvest wain
He was asleep, by that old stream,
And all these things were but a dream— 1560
The King, the Squire, the hurrying ride
Unto the lonely quagmire side ;
The sudden pain, the deadly swoon,
The feverish life from noon to noon ;
The tending of the kind old man,
The black and white Dominican,
The hour before the Abbot's throne,
The poring o'er old books alone,
In summer morns ; the King again,
The envious greetings of strange men,
This mighty horse and rich array, 1570
This journey on an unknown way.

Surely he thought to wake from it
And once more by the waggon sit,
Blinking upon the sunny mill.

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

But not for either good or ill
Shall he see one of all those days.

On through the quivering noontide haze
He rode, and now on either hand
Heavy with fruit the trees did stand ;
Nor had he ridden long, ere he
The red towers of the house could see
Grey on the wind-beat southern side :
And soon the gates thrown open wide
He saw, the long-fixed drawbridge down,
The moat with lilies overgrown,
Midst which the gold-scaled fishes lay :
Such peace was there for many a day.

1580

And deep within the archway's shade
The warder on his cloak was laid,
Dozing, one hand upon a harp.
And nigh him a great golden carp
Lay stiff, with all his troubles done,
Drawn from the moat ere yet the sun
Was high, and nigh him was his bane,
An angling rod of Indian cane.

1590

Now hearing Michael's horse-hooves smite
The causeway, shading from the light
His eyes, as one scarce yet awake,
He made a shift his spear to take,
And, eyeing Michael's badge the while,
Rose up, and with a lazy smile,
Said, "Ho ! fair sir, abide, abide,
And show why hitherward ye ride
Unto my lady's royal home."
Said Michael, "From the King I come,

1600

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

As by my badge ye well may see ;
And letters have I here with me
To give my lord the Seneschal."

"Yea," said the man, "but in the hall
He feasteth now ; what haste is there ? 1610
Certes full quickly cometh care ;
And sure I am he will not read
Thy letters, or to aught give heed
Till he has played out all the play,
And every guest has gone away ;
So thou, O damoiseau, must wait ;
Tie up thine horse anigh the gate,
And sit with me, and thou shalt hear
'*The Kaiser lieth on his bier.*'

Thou laughest—hast thou never heard 1620
Of this same valorous Red Beard,
And how he died ? Well, I can sing
Of many another dainty thing,
Thou wilt not a long while forget,
The budget is not empty yet.
—Peter ! I think thou mockest me,
But thou art young and fair perdie,
I wish thee luck—well, thou may'st go
And feel the afternoon wind blow
Within Dame Bertha's pleasance here ; 1630
She who was held so lief and dear,
All this was built but for her sake,
Who made the hearts of men to ache ;
And dying full of years and shame
Yet left an unforgotten name—
God rest her soul !"

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Michael the while
Hearkened his talking with a smile,
Then said, "O friend, I think to hear
Both '*The King lieth on his bier*'
And many another song of thee," 1640
Ere I depart; but now show me
The pleasance of the ancient queen;
For these red towers above the green
Seem like the gates of Paradise,
That surely somewhere through them lies."
. Then said the warder, "That may be
If thou know'st what may come to thee.
When past the drawbridge thou hast gone,
Upon the left three steps of stone
Lead to a path beneath the wall 1650
Of the great court, that folk now call
The falconer's path, nor canst thou miss
Going thereby, to find the bliss
Thou look'st for, since the path ends there,
And through a wicket gilded fair
The garden lies where thou wouldst be:
Nor will I fail to come to thee
Whene'er my Lord the Seneschal
Shall pass well fed from out the hall."

Then Michael, thanking him, passed on, 1660
And soon the gilded wicket won,
And went into that pleasance sweet,
And wandered there with wary feet
And open mouth, as though he deemed
That in some lovely dream he dreamed,
And feared to wake to common day,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So fair was all ; and e'en decay
Brought there but pensive loveliness,
Where autumn those old walls did bless
With wealth of fruit, and through the grass 1670
Unscared the spring-born thrush did pass,
Who yet knew nought of winter-tide.

So wandering, to a fountain's side
He came, and o'er the basin hung,
Watching the fishes, as he sung
Some song remembered from of old,
Ere yet the miller won that gold.
But soon made drowsy with his ride,
And the warm hazy autumn-tide,
And many a musical sweet sound, 1680
He cast him down upon the ground,
And watched the glittering water leap,
Still singing low, nor thought to sleep.

But scarce three minutes had gone by
Before, as if in mockery,
The starling chattered o'er his head,
And nothing he remembered,
Nor dreamed of aught that he had seen.

Meanwhile unto that garden green
Had come the Princess, and with her 1690
A maiden that she held right dear,
Who knew the inmost of her mind.
Those twain, as the warm scented wind
Played with their raiment or their hair,
Had late been running here and there,
Chasing each other merrily,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

As maids do, thinking no one by;
But now, well wearied therewithal,
Had let their gathered garments fall
About their feet, and slowly went : 1700
And through the leaves a murmur sent,
As of two happy doves that sing
The soft returning of the spring.

But of the two the Princess spoke
The less, but into laughter broke
Not seldom, and would redden oft,
As on her lips her fingers soft
She laid, as still the other maid,
Half grave, half smiling, follies said.

So in their walk they drew anigh 1710
That fountain in the midst, whereby
Lay Michael sleeping, dreaming nought
Of such fair things so nigh him brought.
They, when the fountain shaft was past,
Beheld him on the ground down-cast,
And stopped at first, until the maid
Stepped lightly forward to the shade,
And when she had gazed there awhile
Came running back again, a smile
Parting her lips, and her bright eyes 1720
Afire with many fantasies ;
And ere the Lady Cecily
Could speak a word, "Hush ! hush !" said she ;
"Did I not say that he would come
To woo thee in thy peaceful home
Before thy father brought him here ?
Come, and behold him, have no fear !

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The great bell would not wake him now,
Right in his ears."

"Nay, what dost thou?"

The Princess said; "let us go hence; 1730
Thou know'st I give obedience
To what my father bids; but I
A maid full fain would live and die,
Since I am born to be a queen."

"Yea, yea, for such as thou hast seen,
That may be well," the other said.

"But come now, come; for by my head
This one must be from Paradise;
Come swiftly then, if thou art wise
Ere aught can snatch him back again." 1740

She caught her hand, and not in vain
She prayed; for now some kindly thought
To Cecily's brow fair colour brought,
And quickly 'gan her heart to beat
As love drew near those eyes to greet,
Who knew him not till that sweet hour.

So over the fair, pink-edged flower,
Softly she stepped; but when she came
Anigh the sleeper, lovely shame
Cast a soft mist before her eyes 1750
Full filled of many fantasies.
But when she saw him lying there
She smiled to see her mate so fair;
And in her heart did Love begin
To tell his tale, nor thought she sin
To gaze on him that was her own,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Not doubting he was come alone
To woo her, whom midst arms and gold
She deemed she should at first behold ;
And with that thought love grew again 1760
Until departing was a pain,
Though fear grew with that growing love,
And with her lingering footsteps strove
As from the place she turned to go,
Sighing and murmuring words but low.
But as her raiment's hem she raised,
And for her merry fellow gazed
Shamefaced and changed, she met her eyes
Turned grave and sad with ill surprise ;
Who while the Princess mazed did stand 1770
Had drawn from Michael's loosened band
The King's scroll, which she held out now
To Cecily, and whispered low,
" Read, and do quickly what thou wilt.
Sad, sad ! such fair life to be spilt :
Come further first."

With that they stepped
A pace or two from where he slept,
And then she read,

" *Lord Seneschal,*
On thee and thine may all good fall ;
Greeting hereby the King sendeth, 1780
And biddeth thee to put to death
His enemy who beareth this ;
And as thou lovest life and bliss,
And all thy goods thou holdest dear,
Set thou his head upon a spear

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

*A good half furlong from the gate.
Our coming hitherward to wait—
So perish the King's enemies!"*

She read, and scarcely had her eyes
Seen clear her father's name and seal, 1790
Ere all love's power her heart did feel,
That drew her back in spite of shame,
To him who was not e'en a name
To her a little hour ago.
Panting she said, "Wait thou alone
Beside him, watch him carefully
And let him sleep if none draw nigh;
If of himself he waketh, then
Hide him until I come again,
When thou hast told him of the snare— 1800
If thou betrayest me beware!
For death shall be the least of all
The ills that on thine head shall fall.
—What say I? thou art dear to me,
And doubly dear now shalt thou be,
Thou shalt have power and majesty,
And be more queen in all than I.
Few words are best, be wise, be wise!"

Withal she turned about her eyes
Once more, and swiftly as a man 1810
Betwixt the garden trees she ran,
Until, her own bower reached at last,
She made good haste, and quickly passed
Unto her secret treasury.
There, hurrying since the time was nigh

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

For folk to come from meat, she took
From 'twixt the leaves of a great book
A royal scroll, signed, sealed, but blank,
Then, with a hand that never shrank
Or trembled, she the scroll did fill 1820
With these words, writ with clerkly skill,—

*“Unto the Seneschal, Sir Rafe,
Who holdeth our fair castle safe,
Greeting and health! O well-beloved,
Know that at this time we are moved
To wed our daughter, so we send
Him who bears this, our perfect friend,
To be her bridegroom; so do thou
Ask nought of him, since well we know
His race and great nobility, 1830
And how he is most fit to be
Our son; therefore make no delay,
But wed the twain upon the day
Thou readest this: and see that all
Take oath to him, whate'er shall fall,
To do his bidding as our heir;
So doing still be lief and dear
As I have held thee yet to be.”*

She cast the pen down hastily
At that last letter, for she heard 1840
How even now the people stirred
Within the hall: nor dared she think
What bitter potion she must drink
If now she failed, so falsely bold
That life or death did she enfold
Within its cover, making shift

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

To seal it with her father's gift,
A signet of cornelian.

Then swiftly down the stairs she ran
And reached the garden ; but her fears 1850
Brought shouts and thunder to her ears,
That were but lazy words of men
Full-fed, far off ; nay, even when
Her limbs caught up her flying gown
The noise seemed loud enough to drown
The twitter of the autumn birds,
And her own muttered breathless words
That to her heart seemed loud indeed.

Yet therewithal she made good speed
And reached the fountain seen of none, 1860
Where yet abode her friend alone,
Watching the sleeper, who just now
Turned in his sleep and muttered low.
Therewith fair Agnes saying nought
From out her hand the letter caught ;
And, while she leaned against the stone,
Stole up to Michael's side alone,
And with a cool, unshrinking hand
Thrust the new scroll deep in his band,
And turned about unto her friend ; 1870
Who having come unto the end
Of all her courage, trembled there
With face upturned for fresher air,
And parted lips grown grey and pale,
And limbs that now began to fail,
And hands wherefrom all strength had gone,

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Scarce fresher than the blue-veined stone
That quivering still she strove to clutch.

But when she felt her lady's touch,
Feebly she said, "Go! let me die" 1880

And end this sudden misery
That in such wise has wrapped my life.
I am too weak for such a strife,
So sick I am with shame and fear;
Would thou hadst never brought me here!"

But Agnes took her hand and said,
"Nay, queen, and must we three be dead
Because thou fearest? all is safe
If boldly thou wilt face Sir Rafe."

So saying, did she draw her hence, 1890

Past tree and bower and high pleached fence
Unto the garden's further end,
And left her there and back did wend,
And from the house made haste to get
A gilded maund wherein she set
A flask of ancient island wine,
Ripe fruits and wheaten manchets fine,
And many such a delicate

As goddesses in old time ate,
Ere Helen was a Trojan queen; 1900

So passing through the garden green
She cast her eager eyes again
Upon the spot where he had lain,
But found it empty, so sped on
Till she at last the place had won
Where Cecily lay faint, weak and white
Within that fair bower of delight.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Her straight she made to eat and drink,
And said, "See now thou dost not shrink
From this thy deed; let love slay fear
Now, when thy life shall grow so dear,
Each minute should seem loss to thee
If thou for thy felicity
Couldst stay to count them; for I say,
This day shall be thy happy day."

1910

Therewith she smiled to see the wine
Embraced by her fair fingers fine,
And her sweet face grow bright again
With sudden pleasure after pain.

Again she spoke, "What is this word
That dreaming, I perchance have heard,
But certainly remember well?
That some old soothsayer did tell
Strange things unto my lord the King,
That on thy hand the spousal ring
No Kaiser's son, no King should set,
But one a peasant did beget—
What say'st thou?"

1920

But the Queen flushed red;
"Such fables I have heard," she said;
"And thou—is it a scathe to me,
The bride of such a man to be?"

1930

"Nay," said she, "God will have him King;
How shall we do a better thing
With this or that one than He can?
God's friend must be a goodly man."

But with that word she heard the sound
Of folk who through the mazes wound

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

Bearing the message ; then she said,
" Be strong, pluck up thine hardihead,
Speak little, so shall all be well,
For now our own tale will they tell." 1940

And even as she spoke they came,
And all the green place was aflame
With golden raiment of the lords ;
While Cecily, noting not their words,
Rose up to go ; and for her part
By this had fate so steeled her heart,
Scarce otherwise she seemed, than when
She passed before the eyes of men
At tourney or high festival 1950
But when they now had reached the hall,
And up its very steps they went,
Her head a little down she bent ;
Nor raised it till the dais was gained
For fear that love some monster feigned
To be a god, and she should be
Smit by her own bolt wretchedly.
But at the rustling, crowded dais
She gathered heart her eyes to raise,
And there beheld her love indeed, 1960
Clad in her father's serving weed,
But proud, and flushed, and calm withal ;
Fearless of aught that might befall,
Nor too astonished, for he thought,—
" From point to point my life is brought
Through wonders till it comes to this ;
And trouble cometh after bliss,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And I will bear all as I may,
And ever as day passeth day,
My life will hammer from the twain, 1970
Forging a long enduring chain."

But midst these thoughts their young eyes met,
And every word did he forget
Wherewith men name unhappiness
As read again those words did bless
With double blessings his glad ears.
And if she trembled with her fears,
And if with doubt, and love, and shame,
The rosy colour went and came
In her sweet cheeks and smooth bright brow, 1980
Little did folk think of it now,
But as of maiden modesty,
Shamefaced to see the bridegroom nigh.

And now when Rafe the Seneschal
Had read the message down the hall,
And turned to her, quite calm again
Her face had grown, and with no pain
She raised her serious eyes to his
Grown soft and pensive with his bliss,
And said,

"Prince, thou art welcome here, 1990
Where all my father loves is dear,
And full trust do I put in thee,
For that so great nobility
He knoweth in thee; be as kind
As I would be to thee, and find
A happy life from day to day,
Till all our days are past away."

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

What more than found the bystanders
He found within this speech of hers,
I know not ; some faint quivering 2000
In the last words ; some little thing
That checked the cold words' even flow
But yet they set his heart aglow,
And he in turn said eagerly :—

“Surely I count it nought to die
For him who brought me unto this ;
For thee, who givest me this bliss ;
Yea, even dost me such a grace
To look with kind eyes in my face,
And send sweet music to my ears.” 2010

But at his words she, mazed with tears,
Seemed faint, and failing quickly, when
Above the low hum of the men
Uprose the sweet bells' sudden clang,
As men unto the chapel rang ;
While just outside the singing folk
Into most heavenly carols broke ;
And going softly up the hall
Boys bore aloft the verges tall
Before the Bishop's gold-clad head. 2020

Then forth his bride young Michael led,
And nought to him seemed good or bad
Except the lovely hand he had ;
But she the while was murmuring low,
“If he could know, if he could know,
What love, what love, his love should be !”

But while mid mirth and minstrelsy
The ancient Castle of the Rose

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Such pageant to the autumn shows,
The King sits ill at ease at home, 2030
For in these days the tidings come
That he who in his line should wed
Lies in his own town stark and dead,
Slain in a tumult of the street.

Brooding on this he deemed it meet,
Since nigh the day was come, when she
Her bridegroom's visage looked to see,
To hold the settled day with her,
And bid her at the least to wear 2040
Dull mourning guise for gold and white.
So on another morning bright,
When the whole promised month was past,
He drew anigh the place at last
Where Michael's dead head, looking down
Upon the highway with a frown,
He doubted not at last to see.
So 'twixt the fruitful greenery
He rode, scarce touched by care the while,
Humming a roundel with a smile.

Withal, ere yet he drew anigh, 2050
He heard their watch-horn sound from high,
Nor wondered, for their wont was so,
And well his banner they might know
Amidst the stubble lands afar :
But now a distant point of war
He seemed to hear, and bade draw rein,
But listening cried, " Push on again !
They do but send forth minstrelsy
Because my daughter thinks to see

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

With that he made the sign to turn,
And straight the autumn air did burn
With many a point of steel and gold ; 2180
And through the trees the carol rolled
Once more, until the autumn thrush
Far off 'gan twittering on his bush,
Made mindful of the long-lived spring.

So mid sweet song and tabouring,
And shouts amid the apple-grove,
And soft caressing of his love,
Began the new King Michael's reign.
Nor will the poor folk see again 2190
A king like him on any throne,
Or such good deeds to all men done :
For then, as saith the chronicle,
It was the time, as all men tell,
When scarce a man would stop to gaze
At gold crowns hung above the ways.

NOTES

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| <p><small>LINE</small></p> <p>47. The transmuting stone: the philosopher's stone, a substance which had the power of changing or transmuting other metals into gold.</p> <p>79. Glittering text: the stars, which he reads like sentences in a book.</p> <p>101. Misery: great poverty (Fr. <i>misère</i>).</p> <p>105. Pleasance: a pleasure-garden.</p> <p>108. Close: an enclosed field, garden, or orchard, among open fields or <i>leas</i> (see below, line 440).</p> <p>129. Bushment: a shortened form of <i>ambushment</i>, for which we commonly use another shortened form, <i>ambush</i>.</p> <p>148. Erne: an eagle.</p> <p>199. Brake: bracken or common fern.</p> <p>216. Erst: formerly.</p> <p>229. Carle: a countryman.</p> <p>252. Green wine: wine that has not matured by keeping.</p> <p>362. Point: a note or call blown upon a hunting-horn.</p> | <p><small>LINE</small></p> <p>383. From the beech-tree dine: feed off dishes made of beechwood.</p> <p>422. Drearihood: wretchedness.</p> <p>428. Bede: prayer.</p> <p>478. Dight: prepared.</p> <p>539. Chamberlain: the servant who has charge of the chambers or bedrooms.</p> <p>550. Unmeet: unfit.</p> <p>569. Millhead: the upper part of a watermill, which feeds the waterwheel. The lower part into which the water runs from the wheel is the milltail (see below, line 733).</p> <p>600. Junkets: dishes of curds.</p> <p>606. Some Michael: some picture of the Archangel Michael piercing the Dragon with his spear, painted on the wall inside a church.</p> <p>715. Remembered them: recollected (Fr. <i>se rappelaient</i>).</p> <p>723. Well betide me St. Peter: may St. Peter grant me good luck.</p> <p>731. Equerry: a servant in charge</p> |
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NOTES

LINE

- of the stables (Fr. *écurie*, a stable).
 760. **Scroll**: a ribbon or strip of paper.
 761. **Charged with**: carrying upon it.
 771. **Arched crown**: an ordinary crown was a circlet with an ornamented edge; the arched or Imperial crown had four arches springing from the circlet and meeting over the centre of the crown.
 796. **Little lettered skill I can**: I am master of little skill in reading.
 812. **'Prentice skill**: the skill of an apprentice or beginner.
 840. **Muster**: a gathering or assembly.
 842. **On Barnaby the bright**: on St. Barnabas day, the 11th of June, which was a favourite day for fairs and festivals.
 855. **Stares**: starlings.
 869. **Hinds**: farm-labourers.
 937. **The black monks**: Dominican monks, whose dress is a black cloak worn over a white robe and hood; they were commonly called the Black Friars. See below, line 1565.
 975. **Mirk**: dark or dim.
 981. **Trolls**: dwarfs who lived underground and were skilful workers in metal.

LINE

982. **Faërie**: the race of fays, or, as they were later called, fairies, by a mistake like that which we should make if we spoke of *infantries*, meaning foot-soldiers.
 1091. **Nathless**: nevertheless.
 1149. **Erigone**: this refers to a folk-tale of ancient Greece, according to which the invention of wine was introduced in Attica by Icarius and his daughter Erigone; the country people made offerings to them at the vintage season.
 1187. This line is, by some accident, left without any line rhyming to it.
 1230. **Armed staves and coats of fence**: sticks fitted with steel blades or points, for use as weapons, and coats with iron plates fastened on to them for defence of the wearer against thrusts or cuts.
 1368. **My rose**: the badge of a rose, borne by the King's servants.
 1413. **Seneschal**: a steward or head-servant in a great house.
 1444. **Plumb the moat**: sink to the bottom of the moat, like a plummet let down to find the depth of water.

NOTES

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| 1462. White-coifed : wearing white caps. | 1897. Manchets : cakes. |
| 1463. Maunds : baskets. | 1958. Dais : a raised floor at the upper end of a hall. |
| 1483. Baily : a street or suburb just outside the gate of a walled town. | 2019. Verges : long rods borne in a procession by officials called vergers (Lat. <i>virga</i>). |
| 1540. Matters of their cheer : things that they had to eat. | 2049. Roundel : a song or catch. |
| 1594. His bane : the instrument which had brought his death upon him. | 2076. Bills : long two-handed axes. |
| 1616. Damoiseau : a young man of noble birth, literally "young master" (Lat. <i>dominicellus</i>). | 2127. Collar : the mark of an order of knighthood, as the Collar of the Garter or of the Golden Fleece. |
| 1621. Red Beard : the Emperor Frederick I. (1155-1190) nicknamed Barbarossa or Red Beard. He was drowned in a small river in Asia Minor in the Third Crusade. | 2128. Banner cut foursquare : when a knight was raised in rank, the <i>pennon</i> or pointed flag which he bore in battle or at tournaments had the point cut off and was thus made into a square <i>banner</i> . |
| 1625. Budget : bag. | 2130. Stricken field : a battle-field; more exactly, a field where strokes are given and received; so also <i>foughten field</i> , a field where a fight takes place. |
| 1627. Perdie : assuredly (Lat. <i>per Deum</i>). | 2146. Anigh to Paradise : according to tradition, Adam, after he was driven out of Paradise, lived and brought up his family near where the city of Damascus afterwards was founded; his grave was shown there. |
| 1714. Fountain shaft : the jet of water sent up by the fountain. | |
| 1877. Blue-veined stone : the marble basin of the fountain. | |
| 1891. Pleached : woven in a trellis (Lat. <i>plexus</i>). | |
| 1896. Island wine : wine from the islands of Cyprus or Crete. | |